

DICKENS' AMATEUR THEATRICALS.

From Every Saturday.

It is now some eighteen years since the present writer—then in his school days—took part in the earliest of those evening festivities at the house of the late Charles Dickens, which continued annually for several years, terminating with the performance of Mr. Wilkie Collins's drama of 'The Frozen Deep.'

And when he remembers the number of notable men who either shared in or assisted (in the French sense) at those dramatic revels, who have passed away in the interval, he is filled with a desire to preserve some recollections of evenings so memorable.

"What nights have we seen at the Mermaid!" What evenings were those at Tavistock House, when the best wit, and fancy, and culture of the day, met within a hospitable wall! There was Thackeray, towering in bodily form above the crowd, even as he towered in genius above them all, save only one; Jerrold, with the blue convex eye, which seemed to pierce into the very heart of things and trace their subtle resemblances; Leech, with his frank and manly beauty, fresh from the portrayal of "Master Jacky," or some other of the many forms of boyhood he knew so well; Mark Lemon, "the frolic and the gentle" (dear to all us younger ones, irrespective of blood-relationship, as "Uncle Mark"); and, in the dropping of the late in the evening after a two or three hour sandstent ascent of Mont Blanc, but never refusing at our earnest entreaty to sit down to the piano and sing us "My Lord Tomnoddy," or his own latest edition of 'Gulliver's Messenger; Augustus Egg, with his dry humor, touching from contrast with the face of suffering that gave sad presage of his early death; Frank Stone, the kindly neighbor and friend, keen as any of us boys for his part in the afterpiece; Stanfield, and the beaming face, "the largest universal like the sun," his practiced hand and brush prompt to gladden us with masterpieces of scene painting for the Lighthouse or the Ice-fields; and last—but not here to be dismissed with a few lines only—our bountiful host, like Triplet, "author, manager, and actor too;" organizer, deviser, and harmonizer of all the incongruous assembled elements; the friend whom we have so lately lost, the incomparable Dickens. The very walls of that home and the furniture which filled it were rich in interest and eloquence of his fame and the tribute which it had brought him; the testimonial given him at Birmingham; the handsome case of cutlery sent him by Mr. Brooks, of Sheffield (recognizant of the chance mention of his name in the pages of "Copperfield"); Grip the raven, in his habit as he lived, under the glass case in the hall; the Chinese gong, then less common in English houses than now, reminding the reader familiar with his "Dickens," of that one at Dr. Blimber's which the weak-eyed young man, to Paul's amazement, suddenly flew at "as if he had gone mad or wanted vengeance;" the pictures which looked down upon us from the walls of dining-room and staircase, Mr. Charles Colden in his ploughboy's disguise, or Bobadil prostrate on the couch; the lady in the boudoir reading the current number of "Bleak House," and the curious tiger skimming the contents over her shoulder; Dolly Varden in the wood; poor Kate Nickleby at work in Madame Mantalini's show-room; little Nell among the tombs of that old church which in these days of restoration will soon have no existence but on the canvas of George Catermole; these, and many more such signs of the atmosphere of art and literature in which we moved, were gathered then—and are now scattered to the four winds.

In one sense our theatricals began and ended in the school-room. To the last that apartment served us for stage and auditorium and all. But in another sense we got promotion from the children's domain by degrees. Our earliest efforts were confined to the children of the family and their equals in age, though always aided and abetted by the good-natured manager, who improvised costumes, painted and corked our innocent cheeks, and suggested all the most effective business of the scene. Our first attempt was the performance of Albert Smith's little but original 'Guy Ricker's' which appeared originally in the pages of his monthly periodical, the Man in the Moon; at another time we played 'William Tell' from the late Mr. Robert Brough's clever little volume, 'A Cracker Bon-bon for Evening Parties.' In those days there were still extravaganzas written with real humor and abundant taste and fancy. The Broughs, Gilbert and Beckett, and Mr. Planché could write rhymed couplets of great literary excellence, without ever overstepping the bounds of reverence and good taste. Extreme puns may regret that the story of the struggle for Swiss independence should ever be presented to children in association with anything ludicrous; but, those critics excepted, no other could object to the spirit of "gracious fooling" in which Mr. Brough represented William Tell brought up before Gesler for "contempt of hat," Albert, his precocious son, resolving that, as to betraying his father, "though torn in half, I'll not be made to split;" and when he comforts his father, about to shoot at the apple, by assuring him that he is "game," the father replying, "Wert thou in my game, I would preserve, not shoot thee." This is drollery, it seems to us, not unworthy of Sydney Smith or Hood, and in no way to be placed in the same catalogue with the vulgarities and inanities of a later brood.

Another year found us more ambitious, and with stronger resources, for Mr. Dickens himself and Mr. Mark Lemon joined our acting staff, though, with kindly consideration for their young brethren, they chose subordinate parts. In Mr. Planché's elegant and most witty fairy extravaganza of 'Fortunio and His Seven Girls and Servants,' Mr. Dickens took the part of the old Baron Donover, whose daughters so valiantly adopt man's attire and go to the wars; Mr. Lemon contenting himself with the role of the "Dragon," who is overcome by "Fortunio's" stratagem of adulterating the well, whither he usually resorted to quench his thirst, with a potent admixture of sherry. What fun it was, both on and off the stage! The gorgeous dresses from the eminent costumier of the Theatres Royal; our heads bewigged and our cheeks rouged by the hands of Mr. Clarkson himself; the properties from the Adelphi; the suffraging manager and suggestive resources of our manager, who took upon him the charge of everything, from the writing of the playbills to the composition of the punch, brewed for our refreshment between the acts, but "oraciously qualified," as Michael Cassio would have said, to suit the capacities of the childish brain, for Dickens never forgot the maxima reverentia due to children, and some of us were of very tender age; the comedian who played (in a complete jockey's suit and top-boots) Fortunio's servant Light-foot, was—we are afraid to say how young—but it was somewhere between two and three, and he was announced in the bill as having been "kept out of bed at a

vast expense." The same veracious document, by the way, represented the sole lessee and manager of the Theatre Royal, Tavistock House, as Mr. Vincent Crummles, disguising Mr. Dickens himself in the list of dramatic persona as the "Modern Roscius," and Mark Lemon as the "Infant Phenomenon," an exquisitely conceived surprise for the audience who, by no means expected from the description to recognize in the character the portly form of the editor of Punch. The time, by-the-way, must have been the winter preceding the commencement of hostilities with Russia, for Mr. Dickens took advantage of there being a ferocious despot in the play—the Emperor Matapa—to identify him with the Czar in a capital song (would we could recall it) to the tune of "The Cork Leg," in which the Emperor described himself as "the Robinson Crusoe of absolute state," and declared that though he had at his court many a show-day, and many a high-day, he hadn't in all his dominions "a Friday." Mr. Planché had in one portion of the extravaganza put into the mouth of this character for the moment a few lines of burlesque upon "Macbeth," and we remember Mr. Dickens' unsuccessful attempts to teach the performer how to imitate Macready, whom he (the performer) had never seen! And after the performance, when we were restored to our evening-party costumes, and the school-room was cleared for dancing, I may stray to the marble font of that theater church where he was baptized Abjalon, which never can be unmade or undone, I am proud to say, not to please nor give offense to no one, nobles and noveres, sir. Ah! affliction sore long time Maria Nightingale bore; physicians was in vain—not that I am awear she had any one in particular, sir, excepting one, which she tore his hair by handfuls out in consequence of disagreements relative to her complaint; and dead she is, and will be, as the hosts of the Egyptian faeries; and this I shall prove, directly minute, on the evening of my brother the sexton, whom I shall here produce, to your confusion, young person, in the twinkling of a star or humin eye!"

Scarcely had the old lady quitted the stage when Mr. Dickens reappeared as "my brother the sexton," a very old gentleman indeed, with a quavery voice and self-satisfied smile (pleasantly suggesting how inimicable must have been the same actor's manner as "Justice Shallow"), and afflicted with a "hardness of hearing" which almost baffled the efforts of his interrogators to obtain from him the desired information as to the certificate of Mrs. Nightingale's decease. "I use your whispering to me!" was the gentle remonstrance which the first loud shout in his ear elicited; and on the question being put whether "he had ever buried"—he at once interrupted to reply that "he had buried; and that he and his old woman"—"my old woman was a Kentish woman, gentlemen: one year, sir, we brewed some of the strongest ale that you ever drank, sir; they used to call it down in our part of the country (in allusion, you understand, to its great strength, gentlemen), Samson with his hair, which you know, is the thread of his narrative was cut short by the sexton, in a louder key still, of the intended question in a complete farce. A third character in the farce, sustained by Dickens, was that of a *malade imaginaire*, for the time being under treatment by a new specific, "mustard and milk," the merits of which he could not highly enough extol, but which nevertheless was not so soothing in its effects but that the patient gave every minute a loud shriek—explaining apologetically, "That's the mustard; followed immediately by a still louder shriek, and the drama ended with the sexton, who, in the character of our manager appeared, but there was certainly one other, a footman or waiter, in which character the actor gave us a most amusing caricature of the manner of one of his own servants; and we remember with what glee, one night at supper after rehearsal, Dickens learned that the man in question had been imitating his master in the part for the amusement of his fellow-servants, in utter ignorance that he himself had sat in the first instance for the portrait. The same amazing fertility and rapidity of invention which Mr. Dickens understands without a rival as a humorist, often served him in excellent stead, in the sudden substitution of extempore remarks known to the professional actor as "gag." On one occasion in a farce (we forgot its name) played after "The Frozen Deep," one of the characters having occasion to disguise himself for the moment in the chintz-cover of the sofa, Mr. Dickens suddenly observed, to the astonishment of his fellow-actors, "He has a general appearance of going to have his hair cut," a comparison so ingeniously perfect as to console everybody on and off the stage with laughter. In this, as in other instances, with laughter—for example, Mrs. Lirripet's resemblances—Mr. Dickens was merely a seer of scenes from London life more or less loosely strung together. "Nicholas Nickleby" was in this respect little different. In "Copperfield" there is more attention to this specially dramatic faculty, but even in that novel the special skill of the constructor is exhibited rather in episodes of the story than in the narrative as a whole. But from and after the "Tale of Two Cities," Mr. Dickens manifests a diligent pursuit of that art of framing and weaving a plot which had on a little doubt traceable to the influence of his intimate and valued friend Mr. Wilkie Collins. In this special art Mr. Collins has held high rank among living novelists. He is, indeed, we think, open to the charge of sacrificing too much to the composition of riddles, which, like riddles of another kind, lose much of their interest when once they have been solved. And it is interesting to note that while Mr. Dickens was aiming at one special excellence of Mr. Collins, the latter was assimilating his style, in some other respects, to that of his brother novelist. Each, of late years, seemed to be desirous of the special dramatic faculty which the other possessed. Mr. Dickens' plots, Mr. Collins' characters and dialogues, bore more and more clearly marked the traces of the model on which they were respectively based. It is possible, however, that another consideration was influencing the direction of Mr. Dickens' genius. He may have half suspected that the peculiar freshness of his earlier style was no longer at his command, and he may have been desirous of breaking fresh ground and cultivating a faculty too long neglected. As we have said, we believe that his genius was largely dramatic, and that it was the overpowering fertility of his humor as a descriptive writer which led him at the outset of his literary career to prose fiction as the freest outcome of his genius. However that may be, he loved the drama and things dramatic; and notwithstanding what might be inferred from the lecture which Nicholas administers to the literary gentleman in "Nicholas Nickleby," he evidently loved to see his own stories in a dramatic shape, when the adaptation was made in accordance with the spirit and design of the originator. Most of his

earlier works were dramatized, and enjoyed a success attributable not less to the admirable acting which they called forth than to the fame of the characters in their original setting. His Christmas Stories proved most successful in their dramatic shape, and it is difficult to believe that he had not in view those admirable comedians, Mr. and Mrs. Keeley, when he drew the charming characters of Britain and Clemency Newcome. His "Tale of Two Cities" (which, by the way, Mr. Wilkie Collins has somewhere publicly referred to as the finest of his friend's fictions in point of construction) was arranged under his own supervision for the stage, and he seems to have had a growing pleasure in seeing his works reproduced in this shape, for "Little Em'ly," the last arrangement of "David Copperfield," was produced with at least his sanction and approval; and at the present date a version of the "Old Curiosity Shop," under the title of "Nell," is announced for immediate production, as having been similarly approved by himself shortly before his lamented death. In the present state of the stage we may well be thankful for pieces so wholesome in interest, so pure in moral, so abounding in unforced humor, as his best stories are adapted to provide.

NOTICE.—In accordance with the terms of the Lease and Contract between the East Pennsylvania Railroad Company and the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Company, dated May 19, 1869, the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Company will pay at their Office, No. 227 South FOURTH Street, Philadelphia, on and after the 17th day of January, 1871, a dividend of \$1.70 per share, clear of all taxes, to the Stockholders of the East Pennsylvania Railroad Company, as they shall stand registered on the books of the said East Pennsylvania Railroad Company on the 31st day of December, 1870. S. BRADFORD, Treasurer, Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Company.

NOTICE.—The transfer books of the East Pennsylvania Railroad Company will be closed on December 31, 1870, and reopened on January 10, 1871. HENRY C. JONES, Treasurer, East Pennsylvania Railroad Company.

NOTICE TO STOCKHOLDERS.—A DIVIDEND OF FIFTY CENTS PER SHARE will be paid by the HUNTSVILLE, MOBILE & ANSEL FAIRMOUNT PASSENGER RAILROAD COMPANY, free of State tax, on and after December 21st next, at the office of the Company, No. 112 South FRONT Street, Philadelphia. Transfer books will be closed December 15th and reopen December 31st. CHARLES P. HASTINGS, Treasurer.

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SPECIAL NOTICES.

THE ENTERPRISE INSURANCE COMPANY OF PHILADELPHIA, COMPANY'S BUILDING, NO. 400 WALNUT STREET. At the annual meeting of the Stockholders of the Company, held on the 5th day of January, the following gentlemen were elected Directors for the ensuing year: John H. Brown, J. L. Ringer, William M. Atwood, Charles Whelton, Benjamin T. Treddick, James L. Claghorn, George H. Stuart, and Thomas M. Montgomery. At a meeting of the Board of Directors, held this day, F. R. HITCHCOCK was re-elected President, and THOMAS M. MONTGOMERY re-elected Vice-President. ALEXANDER N. WISTER, Secretary.

FARMERS AND MECHANICS' NATIONAL BANK. PHILADELPHIA, Jan. 15, 1871. At an election held on the 11th day of January, 1871, the following named Stockholders were elected Directors of the Bank: Edwin M. Lewis, John Ashhurst, Anthony F. Aiello, Lindley Smyth, Richard C. Dale, Joshua B. Lippincott, J. Edward Farnum, George W. Farr, Jr., William H. Woodward, Charles B. Hutchinson, Henry P. Sisson, Thomas McKeane, George H. Kirkham. And at a meeting of the Directors this day, EDWIN M. LEWIS, Esq., was unanimously re-elected President, and W. RUSHTON, Jr., Cashier.

COMMONWEALTH NATIONAL BANK. PHILADELPHIA, JAN. 15, 1871. At the election held on the 10th instant the following Directors of the Bank were elected: E. P. Mitchell, H. N. Burroughs, Paul F. Solley, John Wanamaker, C. H. Duhring, H. W. Gray, Samuel K. Ashton, William F. Hansell, Robert Morris, Walter G. Wilson, Richard D. Sherrard, Charles S. Lewis, Edward C. Knight, John B. Austin, George H. Stuart, Samuel Smith, Richard Dale Benson, Thomas H. Watson, Henry G. Freeman. At a meeting of the Board of Directors, held this day, HENRY D. SHERRARD, Esq., was unanimously re-elected as President of the Company, and H. C. YOUNG, Cashier.

THE INSURANCE COMPANY OF THE STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA. PHILADELPHIA, JANUARY 11, 1871. At an election held January 9, the following gentlemen were duly elected Directors of this Company: Henry D. Sherrard, Charles S. Lewis, Edward C. Knight, John B. Austin, George H. Stuart, Samuel Smith, Richard Dale Benson, Thomas H. Watson, Henry G. Freeman. At a meeting of the Board of Directors, held this day, HENRY D. SHERRARD, Esq., was unanimously re-elected as President of the Company, and H. C. YOUNG, Cashier.

PHILADELPHIA AND READING RAILROAD COMPANY, OFFICE NO. 227 S. FOURTH STREET. PHILADELPHIA, JAN. 9, 1871. At the Annual Meeting of the Stockholders of this Company, held this day, the following gentlemen were unanimously elected officers for 1871: President—FRANKLIN H. COLLINGS, Secretary—MANAGERS, H. Pratt McKeane, J. B. Lippincott, A. E. Bortie, John Ashhurst, R. C. Cabene, Charles B. Hutchinson, Samuel Bradford, Secretary—S. W. Jones.

ILLUSTRATED LECTURE. WILLIAM WISTER, Lecturer. The "Wonders of Yon-Semite and the Big Trees of California," at 8 o'clock, at the University of Pennsylvania, on MONDAY EVENING, 16th inst., at 8 o'clock. Tickets, 50c. To be had at GOULD & FISCHER'S Piano Store, No. 923 CHESTNUT Street, from 9 A. M. to 5 P. M. H. COLLINGS, Secretary.

THE LORRAINE VEGETABLE CATHARTIC. THE LORRAINE VEGETABLE CATHARTIC is the best Cathartic remedy yet discovered. The most complete success has long attended its use. It never fails to accomplish its purpose, and is perfectly safe. It is sold by all dealers in drugs and medicines.

TURNER'S UNIVERSAL NEURALGIA PILL. TURNER'S UNIVERSAL NEURALGIA PILL is the best in the world, the only true and perfect cure. It is sold by all dealers in drugs and medicines.

BATCHELOR'S HAIR DYE. BATCHELOR'S HAIR DYE is the best in the world, the only true and perfect cure. It is sold by all dealers in drugs and medicines.

THE IMPERISHABLE PERFUM. THE IMPERISHABLE PERFUM is the best in the world, the only true and perfect cure. It is sold by all dealers in drugs and medicines.

THE UNION FIRE EXTINGUISHER COMPANY OF PHILADELPHIA. Manufacture and sell the Improved, Portable Fire Extinguisher. Always Reliable. D. T. GAGE, General Agent.

JAMES M. SGOVEL HAS ESTABLISHED A Law and Collection Agency for Pennsylvania and New Jersey at No. 514 WALNUT Street. (11-29) JOUVIN'S KID GLOVE CLEANER restores soiled gloves equal to new. For sale by all druggists and fancy goods dealers. Price 25 cents per bottle. 11-28mwt DR. F. R. THOMAS, No. 313 WALNUT ST., formerly operator at the 'Citron Dental Rooms,' devotes his entire practice to extracting teeth without pain, with fresh nitrous oxide gas. 11-17) THURSTON'S IVORY PEARL TOOTH POWDER is the best article for cleaning and preserving the teeth. For sale by all druggists. Price 25 and 50 cents per bottle. 11-26mwt

GROCERIES, ETC. LITIZ CARRANT WINE. ALBERT C. ROBERTS, Dealer in Fine Groceries, 117 Corner ELEVENTH and VINE STS. OUTLERY, ETC. KNIVES, Pens, and Stag handles, and beautiful Gold, Rodgers', and Wade's Patch's Razors, and the celebrated Leconte Razor; Ladies' Safety Razors, in cases of the best quality; Rodgers' Table Cutlery, Carvers and Forks, Razor Strops, Cork Scrubs, etc. For instruments, to assist the hearing of the most approved construction. F. MADRHAZ, No. 118 TENTH Street, below Chestnut.